

# A COMEDY IN GARTERS

By HELEN LEAH REED



"What  
Cunning  
Little Belts!"  
I Exclaimed.

galleries on Fifth-ave., and the antiquarian shops on Fourth-ave. "Inexpensive amusements," said Richard, one day, with a disagreeable laugh, when I told him where John and I had been. The two were very different, and although Richard was extravagant about some things, John wasn't in the least mean. Besides, he was far the richer of the two, although Aunt Laura told me that Richard was getting on splendidly, and might be taken in as partner the first of the New Year. Already he was in charge of the New York branch of Uncle Jim's business.

John had explained why he could go about with me afternoons better than evenings. He had come to New York on very special business, and had to dine with some man nearly every evening to talk things over. Well, one afternoon I was walking through Tiffany's with John. He had not laughed at me, as Richard did, when I said that this was one of the places I had set my heart on seeing. We had seen the famous glass, and everything up stairs worth seeing, and the diamonds, and were passing in front of a case when I stopped short.

"What cunning little belts!" I exclaimed. "I should really like—" and then I stopped short, as John paused beside me, and I began to point out a particularly pretty clasp—two cupids supporting a wreath.

"But why are they in pairs?" I asked, and then suddenly I found myself turning redder and redder, even before John had said in a mischievous tone that I had never heard before, "I fear they would be a trifle small even for your little waist." Yes, even before he had said this, I knew just what they were, and I was angry enough at my own stupidity. Of course I hurried on without a second glance, feeling as if the blood would burst through my cheeks. "Hush! you are mad y' know," whispered John as he bent over me. I wouldn't have looked up at him for worlds. He must have thought me such a goose, not to have known, I am afraid that we hadn't seen all that we might have seen in the shop, for I hurried toward the door, and soon we were walking up the avenue toward one of the galleries where some new French pictures were on exhibition.

John never made the least allusion to my little break about the belts; but that was just like John, always kind and sensible. Richard couldn't have resisted a laugh at my expense, if he had been in John's place. How it would have bored Richard to look at old silver and furniture. I am sure that he couldn't have told the difference between an Adams and a Chippendale, unlike as they are. But John was a collector, and his own house was a perfect museum.

If Richard, however, didn't care for long walks and old curiosity shops, he was still very attentive, and took us out to dine, and to the theater, and we often had invitations to the same place, because Aunt Laura's New York friends usually included us both. Well, one evening Richard had walked home with me from a dinner at Mrs. Gray's, whose house was too near to make a cab worth while. He had been talking sentimentally, and walked so slowly that Mr. Gray and Aunt Laura reached the house several minutes before us. Of course I knew that sentimentality was a kind of habit of Richard's—and he certainly was handsomer than John. But I hurried in, almost without saying good night. The next evening, which was to be my last in New York, I went to the theater with Richard, and again we walked home. Aunt Laura had not gone with us, because she was tired. As we walked from the car, Richard began to reproach me for hurrying so the evening before.

"But all the same," he concluded, "I waited until you went to bed. It was a good half hour too."

"Why, how did you know?" I fairly gasped. "How did you know when I went to bed?"

"Oh, I watched the front of the house until you had time to get up stairs. Then I saw a light appear in a certain window that I knew must be yours, and I watched until the light was put out. It was a cold night too, and I must have stood there a good half hour."

But whether he expected sympathy or sentiment from me, he didn't get it. I shook hands with him, and said good by; but I hurried in just the same as the night before. Still,

when I got to my room, I did feel a little sorry, and turned my light on the least little bit and drew up a blind. Yes! there he was standing under the lamp post on the opposite side. I could see him plainly enough, for my window was open. So, though it seemed a ridiculous thing to do—I mean it seems ridiculous now—I waved my hand, and then raising it to my lips, waved it a second time. Of course it wasn't a kiss, and there was no little light in the room that very likely Richard couldn't see me. That at least was the thought with which I tried to console myself later when I began to reflect on my foolishness.

After all, if Richard did see that half kiss, it wasn't so very bad, because this was really our good by. For this was Tuesday evening, and Wednesday we were to go home. John was to see us on the Limited, as Richard, for some reason, could not leave his office in the middle of the day.

Well, in the morning before I had finished my rather late breakfast a special messenger came with a small box for me. What do you suppose it was? Just as soon as I saw it I had a queer feeling. It had Tiffany's name on the label, but the address was lettered, as if the writer wished to disguise his hand. Sure enough, when I opened the box there was no card. A number of questions rushed through my mind before I took the gift from its wrapping. Why hadn't the sender let the clerk direct the label? Why should anyone send me an anonymous present? But when I held the two little curls in my hand, I knew. It was like John. He just didn't want the clerk to know that he would give such a present to a girl, and so he had carried the box off to send by messenger himself.

Luckily, almost everyone had left the table by this time; there was only Mrs. de Voster to show any interest, and widows really can be actually curious.

"It isn't a large enough box for flowers, or even candy," she said, while I was fiddling with the strings. "Perhaps it's a coronet," she whispered mischievously as she stood over me, and though I didn't show them to her her sharp eyes spied what was really in the box.

"They are almost too valuable for ordinary daily wear," she said. "I lost one myself the other evening in a cab, and as I didn't take the man's number there's no chance of my ever seeing it again."

Aunt Laura luckily hasn't the least curiosity. She didn't even ask me what came in the box, nor who sent it. But then John had sent her a box of beautiful roses that morning, probably by the same messenger who brought my box.

Of course I didn't mean to keep the things, and if I had had time I should have done them up and sent them back. But at the last minute Aunt Laura slipped the box into my trunk, and it was locked and strapped and on its way down stairs already. So I could only wait until I got back home. As I couldn't return the things to him, I didn't quite dare to say anything to John at the station, and perhaps it was just as well. For he seemed quite unconscious of having offended me, and the box of American beauties that he had for me was twice as large as the one he gave Aunt Laura.

I dare say John didn't realize how the thing



I Sprang to My Feet in Anger.

ALL about a garter—or two garters, perhaps, just as you choose to look at it, or not. But you can hardly understand garters, unless I begin at the beginning. I was so much younger then, almost three years ago, and Tiffany's was as new to me as New York. New York itself seemed large and overwhelming, and I was always expecting strange things to happen. Generally they didn't, yet I found myself blushing time and again at things that weren't intended to make me blush, when I thought them over. Then sometimes I didn't blush at what ought to have made me turn red, and it didn't much matter a bit when I felt the blood pounding against my cheeks hours afterward when I was alone in my room. So, to keep from seeming too unsophisticated, I put on an air of worldly wisdom, which sometimes probably didn't fit very well on a girl of nineteen. You see, on account of my grandmother's death, I hadn't come out the winter before; and so, because I didn't wish to seem too young, I dare say I made some mistakes. Perhaps this is only one way of trying to excuse Richard; but still you must judge for yourself.

Richard is Aunt Laura's husband's nephew. That makes him as good as willing to let me go about with him. She felt as if we were cousins, though of course we were not. He is ever so much older, and I never had seen much of him, except in his college vacations when he used to visit Aunt Laura, and I was just a little girl. Still he did seem like an old friend when he came to us in New York, and Aunt Laura never noticed the sentimental manner that he had in talking with me.

John is just as different from Richard as one man can be from another. He is younger, but he seems older, for he is so very serious; and he doesn't always understand a joke, until you have called his attention to it. That was why the garters seemed so strange. But there! I am getting ahead of my story.

John came over in the train with us. He had some important matters to attend to, and it was very nice to have him on the Limited with us. He looked after us beautifully, and talked about the things I must see and do in New York, and thought it a pity that I meant to spend so much time shopping, though I tried to make him understand that that was really why I had come over. Richard met us at the train, and took possession of us so completely that John drove off in another cab and said he would see us later. Richard went up to our boarding house with us, and laughed at us for not staying at a hotel, and called Aunt Laura provincial because she said it wasn't proper for ladies alone to stay at one of those old-fashioned caravansaries. The house was on one of those cross streets above Madison Square, with long, high steps at the front door, and a general air of faded gentility.

Aunt Laura had been in the habit of staying there on all her visits to New York for many years, and some of the permanent boarders she knew very well. She felt so much at home there that she didn't in the least mind my leaving her when I went out with John afternoons. Of course we always asked her to go with us; but she always made the same answer: that a morning of shopping had so tired her that she really must rest. Besides, she told me privately, it would have bored her to do the things that John and I liked to do—the Lenox Library and the art